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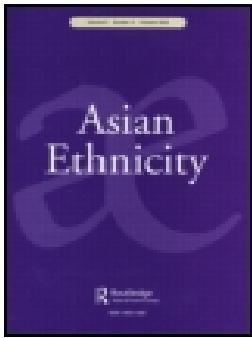
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ARTICLE



Koreans in Central Asia – a different Korean nation

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to illustrate the cultural changes that have taken place among Korean ethnic groups living in the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. Previous research on Korean minorities has demonstrated the impact of state intervention on the formation of ethnic identity. Despite a wide range of regional differences, those living in Korea in the nineteenth century belonged to one ethnic group. Once they left the northern part of the country for Russia, they began to adopt Russian culture relatively quickly. Following their deportation to Central Asia in the 1930s, they then experienced a largely Soviet model of inclusion into mainstream society. However, since the 1980s, when confronted with 'original' Korean culture, they now consider themselves to be dissimilar to other Korean groups. The differences are already so substantial that Koreans themselves now talk about belonging to different nations.

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Introduction

People from an ethnic group living in the territories of other countries provide an excellent example of the impact state and government interventions have on the culture of these groups. It is also possible to see how interventions from different states have influenced the national culture of the original, relatively uniform, ethnic group. Indeed, over several generations, so many changes occur that it becomes difficult to talk of a uniform ethnic group, even though the group still constitutes one ethnonym (Korean). Koreans living in different parts of Central Asia are highly integrated into their respective societies/countries but, to varying degrees, have retained specific cultural traits.

This work distinguishes between North Korean, South Korean and Soviet Korean identities. Although these groups are by no means uniform and homogeneous, collective terms such as these help to describe these groups and, moreover, are terms the groups themselves use.

This approach is analogous to describing different groups of Germans according to the state where they live. For example, Eastern and Western Germans were attributed a distinct ethnicity because they possessed many differences that did not fit into the concept of 'German unity'.¹ Other 'Germans', for example, were immigrants from the Soviet Union (Soviet Germans) or 'Germans' living in East Belgium, formerly part of Germany. The members of these groups also adopted their own ethnicity.

This article aims to answer the following questions:

- What do Soviet Koreans regard as the typical and most important elements of their culture (is it possible to talk of a unified Korean culture)?
- What are the main similarities in, and differences between, the culture of Soviet Koreans and Koreans living on the Korean Peninsula?
- What affects the formation of cultural and ethnic differences among Koreans?

In choosing research questions, therefore, the primary emphasis has been placed on determining the main cultural characteristics of Central Asian people who have declared their membership of a Korean ethnic group (e.g. in a population census, through membership of national societies, or simple verbal statements). Priority was also given to identifying who these people (often referred to as Soviet Koreans) classify as members of their 'own' group and who they do not.

It is often impossible to clearly define an ethnic group using a simple dichotomy such as 'us' and 'them'. Eriksen² states that the degree to which identification with a certain group occurs depends on the degree of external pressure experienced (from the state or different ethnic groups). Groups, however, do not simply function as a result of external pressure, they function because members also receive benefits from belonging to these groups, benefits that engender mutual solidarity and loyalty.

When these theories are applied to Korean minorities living in Central Asia, there is no longer any clearly defined boundaries between 'us' and 'them', instead there is fluidity and overlap between the different groups. Thus, when individuals and groups are compared, they are classified according to the following scale: 'us' → 'like us' → 'closer to them' → 'distant from them'. In extending the classification of 'us' and 'them', such groups do not have ethnic boundaries but will often have cultural boundaries. A boundary may thus exist between the organised world of an ethnic group and those who enter the world of the group yet do not respect their customs. For example, the Kazakh population acknowledges the cultural proximity of local Koreans (who lead a conflict-free coexistence), and vice versa. However, they often express a negative perception of cultural differences among Kazakhs who have recently immigrated into the country from China or Mongolia. Despite all the proclamations of a unified Kazakh nation, local Kazakhs and Kazakh immigrants continue to coexist in a state of cultural conflict.

This work is based on repeated medium-term research of Korean minorities in Uzbekistan (mainly the regions of Tashkent, Samarkand and Khorezm), Kazakhstan (Alma-Ata, Karaganda, Astana and Balkhash) and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek); it was conducted between 2013 and 2015. During the research, emphasis was on the use of qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews). The aim of this research was to obtain data that will expand existing knowledge on Soviet Koreans, and will achieve this, gauging respondents' personal views of their own culture and ethnicity. Among those initially contacted were the chairmen of Korean associations. Through these contacts, other respondents were then approached using a snowball sampling procedure. However, because some groups of Koreans were not organised into associations, other respondents were recruited through Korean priests active in Central Asia and in the areas where Koreans live and work (villages, bazaars, and so on.). Most respondents (32) were of retirement age, while 22 were of working age and 18

respondents were under the age of 25. The male to female ratio was 65:35. Biographical books and materials published by Korean associations in Central Asia were also utilised for this research. The names of the respondents are real, and their full details are given only once (the first time they are mentioned in the text, and thereafter only by their name). If the respondents have asked to remain anonymous, the only details provided are their gender, approximate age and the location of the interview.

There was no significant difference in respondents' reporting in different regions within one state – major differences were seen much more when comparing respondents from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Most literature related to the culture of Soviet Koreans (Korjösaram) has been written directly by members of this group – especially since the 1990s, when a large number of memoirs were published. Somewhat surprising is the fact that, in Korea, there exists no systematic research mapping Korean minorities in the territory of Central Asia. With this said, however, one exception is E. Yim, who publishes works relating to the identity of Koreans in Kazakhstan. A greater research interest in Soviet Koreans is apparent among Russian-speaking (Kim German) or Japanese (e.g. Oka Natsuka, who compares other Central Asian minorities) authors. The literature on this topic, written in the English language, is extensive. For example, A. Diener addresses transnationalism and minority territorialisation in Central Asia, and has studied the perception of homeland by Kazakh Koreans.³ J.F. Shin, on the other hand, extensively describes the specific characteristics of Koreans in Kazakhstan. At the same time, she also notes the significant delimitation of Soviet Koreans, who continually compare themselves with 'others' and maintain a distinct boundary.⁴

Analysis of ethnic identity in Soviet and Central Asian area

In both Soviet and post-Soviet space, the concepts of nation, nationality, ethnicity, ethnos and ethnic identity are defined differently in comparison to Europe.

For people living in the Soviet Union, the theories of former Soviet leaders Lenin and Stalin (aspects of which originate from the work of Marx) have had the greatest impact. It is difficult to determine the true author of the Stalinist concept of the nation, as there is considerable similarity in the writings of the Austrian Marxists, O. Bauer, K. Renner and K. Kautsky.⁵

Lenin and Stalin regarded the question of nationalism as very important in the building of a socialist multinational state. However, their primary objective was always the proletarian revolution, which was given priority over issues pertaining to national identity. Nevertheless, Lenin and Stalin disagreed significantly on the solution to national issues. In 1922, Lenin proposed the establishment of the USSR as a loose collection of nation states, each of which would have a considerable degree of autonomy (with an emphasis on using their own language). Stalin criticised these political concessions.

During the years following the Bolshevik Revolution, a European 'triune' model was adopted to address the national issue; this enshrined the ideal of the unity of language, nation (ethnicity) and political formation.⁶

Administrative units were initially created on a national basis with varying degrees of autonomy (from autonomous districts through the autonomous regions to the national

republics). In most cases, this was not a 'bottom-up' process, as claimed in the official statements. The Central Asian population was, for the most part, illiterate, and had no distinct national notion, neither the notion of one Soviet country, nor a socialist country.⁷

This concept was founded on the assumption that a nation's development can only take place within its own political unit. Baldauf⁸ claims that the impact of this policy on the population of Central Asia and other areas of the USSR was crucial because it created a completely new understanding of the nation (*natsiya*), which was now defined as 'persons united by language, customs and race'. Until then, the concept of 'nation' in Central Asia was understood in geographical rather than in cultural terms.

Although the first phase of the solution to the national question, in the 1920s and 1930s, initially offered smaller nations the possibility of cultural development and political autonomy, the reality was often different. Precipitous demographic processes across the USSR led, on the one hand, to the consolidation of chosen nations, while, at the same time, a strong assimilation of other nations took place.⁹

Administrative units were initially created on a national basis and possessed varying degrees of autonomy (from autonomous districts through the autonomous regions to the national republics). According to the Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn,¹⁰ the creation of new autonomous units should not lead to the elimination of a centralised state. On the contrary, with a reinforced party dictatorship, a *de facto* unitary state was effectively realised. Stalin also reiterated Lenin's 1917 claim that the goal of the government is a centralised republic, while federal forms are transient.

The creation of the union republics often solved the 'national question' for citizens of titular nationality. This political and cultural campaign in the 1920s, known as '*kor-enizacija*' (nativisation) and preferred by the leadership of the local cadre, necessarily resulted in some nations belonging to lower-class citizens. In the USSR, an ethnic category of 'nations of the USSR' was formed: its counterpart became the least preferred category of nations whose nation state lay outside the USSR (besides Koreans it was, e.g., Germans, Poles, Dungans, Kurds, Baloch).¹¹

During this period, official *nationality*, as recorded in personal documents, became very important. In Central Europe, the term 'nation' is currently understood primarily as a cultural unit, while 'ethnic group' is often considered synonymous with 'nation'. However, Barth¹² does not consider this to be accurate because it does not encompass all the nuances of ethnic groups. There are many theorists who define the term 'nation' through statehood – thus, they distinguish between a 'nation' (a historical nation having their own state) and an 'ethnic group' (a non-historical stateless nation).¹³ A similar distinction was applied in the USSR, where 'nationality' in respect of a relevant soviet republic was more prestigious than 'nationality' without an associated autonomous unit.

The second phase of the solution to the national question in the USSR did not develop the first phase; instead, it completely denied it. From the end of the 1930s, national schools were therefore liquidated, and any hint of national characteristics began to be described as a 'nationalistic deviation'. It was only after Stalin's death that Soviet scholars began to elaborate the theoretical concepts of ethnicity. This change in approach to ethnicity had a clear political context. The 1950s in the USSR were, on the one hand, an arena for political liberalisation, while, on the other hand,

representatives of most of the Soviet republics were striving to increase their autonomy.¹⁴

From the 1950s, the concept of transnational Soviet identity therefore became increasingly promoted while, in the 1930s, Central Asia saw the rapid and artificial creation of a new national identity. In the USSR, ethnic groups have used the term 'ethnos', which was introduced in the 1920s by S.M. Shirokogorov. However, the greatest significance this term has can be seen in the context of Bromlei's dualistic theory of ethnos. According to Bromlei,¹⁵ ethnos varies according to geographical conditions, and is fundamentally influenced by whether ethnic processes are shaped in capitalist or in socialist conditions. The Soviet nation was considered a specific 'ethnos' because, unlike other nations (ethnoses), it was not formed by specific traditions, language or historical consciousness. Soviet identity was originally connected with the Soviet state, Soviet ideology and Soviet patriotism (the creation of a Soviet man), and lower strata of identity may therefore have included ethnic identity.¹⁶

In the 1980s, there were several major works on ethnicity that, to some extent, shocked Soviet schools of thought. For instance, the work of J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger on the 'invention of tradition'¹⁷ entirely contradicted the Soviet understanding of the nation – although the Soviet regime was itself very active in inventing new traditions. Another major work in the field of ethnicity which challenged the Soviet school of thinking was Benedict Anderson's 'Imagined Communities'.¹⁸ He highlighted the transience of the community, and applied this to the concept of an ethnic group and a nation. Although these works had a tremendous impact on the understanding of ethnicity in the West, scientific debate in the USSR has largely neglected them. Differences between Western and Soviet scholars regarding the definition of nationality were explicated by Comaroff in 1990.¹⁹ He argued that the two groups deal with identical problems, such as: 'How do we explain the rise of ethnic conflict?' The fundamental difference between the two, however, lies in their understanding of nationality. For Soviet scholars, nationality is a typical primordialist concept, in that nations have had their own identity since time immemorial, and their development follows similar historical patterns.

Notably, this concept has been maintained in states that were newly established following the collapse of the USSR, when Central Asia made a very visible effort to guarantee the leading role in the state to members of titular nationalities. In this regard, the methods of Central Asian regimes are remarkably consistent with those of the Soviet era. Many presidents of Central Asian republics began to talk of 'reaching the millennial desire of nations' in terms of independence. Thus, there is a preference for the primordial concept of the nation, along with references to Soviet historians of the 1920s and 1930s who created the famous history of Central Asian nations²⁰ (those who responded to the newly established union republics). Such concepts are sometimes passed on without being subjected to a critical assessment by Central Asian scholars.

Historical background

Migration of Koreans from Korea

Although the arrival of Koreans in Central Asia is primarily associated with the period preceding World War II, Koreans first migrated to the Russian Far East in two waves: 1867 to -ca. 1900 and 1910–1928. The first of these therefore occurred in the nineteenth century, when migrants slowly moved from the north of Korea to the Russian Far East.

In 1867, the Russian explorer Przhevalsky explained why Koreans first migrated to Russia (overpopulation in Korean areas, poverty and despotism of local feudalists) and noted the emergence of the first Korean villages on the Russian riverbanks (Tyzen-che/Виноградная, Janchi-che/Цуканово and Sidi/Безверхово).

After 1863, when the first 12 Korean families moved to Russia, the number of immigrating Koreans increased year on year, reaching 1800 by 1867.²¹ Illegally crossing the border into Russia was, however, punishable by death in Korea. In contrast, Russian leaders openly supported immigration by Koreans. Przhevalsky, who lived among Koreans (Koreans called themselves Kauli), greatly appreciated their diligence. Przhevalsky noted their polygynous nature in that some men had many female partners. These women did not have their own names and were known only in relational terms (mother, aunt, grandmother). Przhevalsky notes that '[a]lthough the arrival of the first Koreans in Russia happened a few years ago, some Koreans have embraced Orthodoxy and Korean names have been exchanged for Russian'.²²

As a result of poor harvests in the northern part of Korea, the arrival of Koreans in Russia in the winter of 1869 intensified. Nasekin²³ describes gunmen firing at Korean refugees and recalls the many dead bodies on the shore of the Korean border river. Nevertheless, in the 1870s, there were 32 Korean villages in the Russian Far East. Until 1884, Koreans who migrated to Russia could remain in Russian border areas, whereas later arrivals had to move to more distant locations.

This initial period was characterised by the maintenance of Korean cultural practices and only superficial discussion concerning Russian cultural elements. Koreans integrating into Russian society supported tsarist Russia economically: for instance, Russian citizens paid fewer taxes. Obtaining citizenship, however, required a certain loyalty to Russia (language knowledge, acceptance of Orthodoxy). Nevertheless, integration was not immediately practicable for many reasons. The Koreans were different from the Russians in all respects: for example, they built houses differently, both males and females wore their hair long, and they enjoyed different cuisines. Although the society in tsarist Russia cannot be characterised by distinctive individualism, the Korean way of life was much more focused on solidarity.²⁴

The second wave of Korean arrivals in Russia followed Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. Korean schools were created in the territory of Russia, causing Korean groups to seek to overthrow the Japanese occupation government.²⁵ The Koreans' situation in Russia was initially favourable, but later Koreans with Russian citizenship had to fight in the Russian army during World War I.

The arrival of Koreans in Russia continued even after World War I, particularly after the failed uprising of Koreans on 1 April 1919. In 1928, the Soviet government prevented the arrival of Korean immigrants.

The wave of Koreans who travelled to Russia as a result of Korea's occupation by Japan differed significantly from previous waves of migrants; most were political migrants who wanted to lead the struggle for Korean independence from Russia. Korean involvement in the fields of culture and education formed a key part of this struggle. Two groups of Koreans therefore lived side by side, although there was no significant difference between them in terms of the time they had spent living in Russia. The stratification of Koreans thus existed more in the form of social or educational divisions.

After the end of World War I, many Russian Koreans defended Bolshevik ideals. To a large degree, these were the descendants of Koreans who had come to Russia in the nineteenth century.

Vladislav, 62 years old: *After the war, my grandfather returned to Vladivostok. There reigned unimaginable anarchy and various groups formed every moment totally different alliances. As soon as civil war broke out fully, most Koreans took the side of the Bolsheviks.* (Field research: Uzbekistan, 2013)

Soon after taking power, the Bolsheviks began expropriating property, initially from the rich. During the first wave of expropriations (beginning in 1918) conducted in Russia and later in the Soviet Union (USSR), Koreans from the Far East were not greatly affected as most owned very little in the way of property. It was primarily after 1928 that controlled and forced collectivisation in the USSR took place.²⁶

Vladislav: *Grandfather's brother returned to the village after the war and received communist training. So he began expropriation – he confiscated land from the richest Koreans in the village and gave it to those who had none. Poor Koreans were enthusiastic and started to support the Reds. After the Red victory, my grandfather's brother became the district secretary.* (Field research: Uzbekistan, 2013)

Vladimir San, aged 72, journalist: *During collectivisation in the Far East, Koreans did not really rebel because they were accustomed to respecting the laws and not to protesting too much: that's the Confucian tradition.* (Field research: Astana, 2015)

During this period (and up until 1937), the Korean population in the Russian Far East had largely become integrated into the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the region. However, Koreans still lived in relatively compact areas where they constituted the majority. Gradually, certain cultural elements associated with Russia became accepted as political pressure was exerted by the Soviet leadership.

This can be clearly seen, for example, in the popularity of songs. Aside from native Korean songs, many Soviet songs (e.g. the 'Lenin Song' and 'Song of the Tractor') became very popular in the 1930s. Soviet Koreans (referred to as Korjösaram) now consider these songs to be part of their cultural tradition, although for the younger

generation they have significantly less meaning. At the turn of the millennium, a survey was conducted²⁷ to investigate the kinds of music preferred by each generation of Soviet Koreans. The results showed that the oldest generation of Soviet Koreans preferred Korean traditional music (79%), while the second generation of Soviet Koreans possessed a relatively broad spectrum of musical preferences ranging from Korean traditional music (32%) and Korean popular music (28%) to Russian popular music (18%). The third generation, on the other hand, chose Russian pop music (29%) and Western popular music (21%) as their favourites while the youngest generation of Soviet Koreans strongly favoured Western popular music (63%). Korean music was preferred by Koreans from Russia's Sakhalin (61%), Kazakh Koreans (52%) and Uzbek Koreans (41%).

Deportation of Koreans to Central Asia

The involuntary transfer of Koreans from the Russian Far East to Central Asia took place in 1937. However, several dozen Koreans lived in Central Asia (some dating from tsarist times) before their forcible expulsion. In the 1920s, Koreans were invited to Central Asia (mainly from the Russian Far East) to begin the cultivation of rice. Other Koreans arrived in Central Asia from the Far East having been sentenced to exile during Stalin's purges in the 1930s.

A mass movement of Koreans into Central Asia was the first in a series of Stalinist population movements and took place in accordance with the Regulation of the Council of People's Commissars №1428-326ss. Displacement was officially justified by the fear of espionage from Japan. However, as stated by Kim,²⁸ Soviet documents show that some form of deportation had been considered by the top leadership of the Communist Party in 1927, 1930 and 1932.

Vladislav: *Talk about the move began in August 1937, but in September it was official. Evacuation centres were sited in train stations, from where wagons drove into Central Asia. It was estimated that the number of displaced Koreans was 180,000. Along the way around 500 people died, which was considered normal because the journey lasted over a month. (Field research: Uzbekistan, 2013)*

After they were set down at the Turkestan steppe, displaced Koreans had to survive their first winter primarily in dugouts, building more substantial huts and houses at a later stage. Survey respondents described how people began to die prematurely in the dugouts due to a lack of basic living facilities. Those Koreans who were set down near larger cities had great difficulty in obtaining even low-paid work.

Vladimir Kim (born 1933): *I remember how, after a long journey from the Far East to Guryev, my relatives could not get a job. My uncle showed us a suitcase full of state decorations and Soviet orders that came from the Far East; but there was no work the whole of autumn and winter. Once he burned everything, even with a suitcase.*²⁹

Respondents' reflections on the journey to Central Asia differ significantly. This is because some perceived coexistence with the people of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to be relatively problem-free, and deportation itself was therefore not seen as too drastic.

Woman, aged 60: *It is true that in the Far East, Koreans had to leave everything. Now we can say we're better off, because in Central Asia things got better later. During the long journey, although several people died, it was mostly the elderly. Beginning at the new place was difficult, but we quickly worked it out.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

However, those who experienced direct displacement (or who knew the story from participants), clearly perceived such action negatively.

Valery, Chairman of the NOIN Association: *The year 1937 and even a couple of years that preceded it were for Koreans absolutely the worst period. I know about the deportation only through my parents: it was something terrible – people were in cattle trucks; many of them died during the journey and a lot upon arrival. There were an awful lot; but official figures are not exact, they are only estimates. Koreans began to live normally after two years.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

After the evacuation of Koreans from the Russian Far East, smaller groups remained in other parts of Russia. According to the 1939 census, 13,524 Koreans lived in Russia (mostly in the Volgograd and Yakutsk regions). After the end of World War II, some moved to Central Asia to a compact Korean settlement, and it was at this time that Koreans began to achieve economic success in Central Asia.

Elvira, born 1936, Uzbekistan, 2012: *Our family was not deported to Uzbekistan; we moved here voluntarily after the war – in the Krasnoyarsk region and around Lake Baikal Koreans have lived for a long time. We experienced Stalinist repression: in 1937 my father and grandfather were imprisoned; both of them were executed.*³⁰

Other Koreans had relatives in China and migrated there, especially during the period when the Japanese government were in control from 1910 to 1945. Relations between incoming Koreans and the local population (in the territories of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) were generally considered excellent.

Although the direct persecution of Koreans did not take place at a national level (in the Kazakh SSR and the Uzbek SSR), Koreans did not avoid the repression that was directed from the centre. For example, a published list of unjustly convicted Koreans³¹ shows that most were convicted and executed in 1937 or 1938. Relatively few Koreans were sentenced for alleged anti-Soviet activity at the beginning of the 1930s (in the Far

East) or following World War II. Until Stalin's death in 1953, deported people were considered unreliable by the Soviet state. For this reason, Koreans were not drafted into the army during World War II but instead had to serve in the so-called *Working Army*. This did not provide them with any advantages as this army was similar to the penal camps located in various parts of the USSR.

At the time recruitment into the *Working Army* took place, several Koreans were living elsewhere (e.g. students); consequently, some of them fought on the frontline. During World War II, some Koreans moved into neighbouring republics where they expected better living conditions. However, a strict ban on free movement still applied and they could only move when invited to by their relatives.

Interpretation of respondents' statements on deportation

The respondents' testimonies are ambivalent regarding their perceptions of deportation by the Koreans. All unequivocally describe a feeling of injustice. The Koreans were largely loyal to the Soviet Union, and yet were regarded as hostile elements. As a result of deportation, they also lost all their property. In Central Asia, injustices continued – the Koreans were (as perceived members of an unreliable nation) persecuted and unable to obtain employment. Nevertheless, most respondents talk about this period in an almost stoic fashion. They simultaneously emphasise two positive characteristics: on the one hand, they managed to survive despite all the obstacles placed in their way while, on the other hand, they gratefully recall the help they received from the local (Kazakh or Uzbek) population.

The post-war period

After the war, a ban on the free movement of Koreans remained in place. Anyone on their way to a neighbouring district therefore needed a permit. The subsequent lifting of the ban was accompanied by release conditions, set by the highest representative of the Communist Party, Khrushchev. During this period, Koreans were rewarded for their hard work by being granted the highest of state awards.

Valery: *Koreans were skilled, but for a long time nobody was a Hero of Socialist Labour. Only when the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, Khrushchev, came to us and saw that one Korean had corn that was over three metres high did it change. He asked how it was possible that Koreans didn't have any awards. Then the Koreans began to receive awards.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

Korean collective farms were created in the Far East and, soon after, Koreans arriving in Central Asia began settling in new locations and established collective farms. Locals began to hold Koreans in high regard due to the extraordinary diligence they displayed. They were proving to be hard workers; for example, they could make a fertile field from marshes and reeds.

The post-war period became a turning point for Central Asian Koreans in terms of their integration into mainstream society. The new collective farms were small but, by merging with other farms in the late 1950s, they began to significantly increase their productivity levels. Combining collective farms, however, meant that the previously ethnically uniform farms were now transformed into farms that were ethnically very

mixed. This was the case for one of the most successful collective farms in Uzbekistan, Polar Star. As part of Stalin's repressive rule, the first two chairmen of the kolkhoz were arrested in the Far East, while the third chairman, who was deported along with other Koreans, was arrested in Uzbekistan.

The merger of several collective farms in the 1960s meant that an economic unit was created spanning an area of 3127 ha and housing 1924 families (7828 persons). The newly established kolkhoz comprised Uzbeks (one-third of collective farmers), Kazakhs (26%) and Koreans (just 20%). Other kolkhoz residents included Uyghurs, Russians, Tatars and Turks.

Soviet collective farms were characterised by the degree to which individual members were dependent on the joint economy: the kolkhoz was the institution that supported everyday living, providing jobs, shops, nurseries, schools, hospitals and cultural activities. The collectivised management also rewarded the hardest-working members by providing them with kolkhoz land for rent.

Valery: *Later Koreans became horribly rich while some took to renting collectivised land. They had to fulfil the prescribed plan and prescribed amount of produce to sell at state purchase prices. They were ridiculously low: the bazaar's price was 15 times more. But what Koreans had cultivated outside the plan, you could keep yourself and sell at bazaars.*

For Korean culture, it was very bad, because while toiling half the year, for the rest of the year it was drunk up and lost in playing cards: playing cards was typical for Koreans. Although alcoholism was a big problem among many Koreans, a lot of money was saved for educating their children. (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

From the point of view of local Uzbeks, the diligence shown by Koreans, and the good relations that existed between the two groups, stood in stark contrast to their relationships with other nationalities in the territory of Uzbekistan. The wealth that Koreans accrued was the result of extremely hard work. There were occasional minor attacks on Koreans, but these only occurred at a local level. Uzbek children, for example, ridiculed Korean children for having slanted eyes and for eating dogs. The situation was entirely different for those who were displaced and for whom trade was typical. For example, the locals experienced significantly worse relations with the Jews, whose wealth was mainly derived from trading, and with Meskhetian Turks, who tended to live in very closed, ethnically homogeneous groups.

However, good relations between the majority population and the Korean minority began to deteriorate after the collapse of the USSR. The government of the Central Asian republic strived to guarantee a leading role to current Central Asian regimes notably linked to the Soviet era. Knowledge of the official language was not made a legal prerequisite for citizenship (as it was, for example, in the Baltics,); instead, a certain social status was required. The collapse of the USSR thus reduced the social status of the Korean population (who almost exclusively spoke Russian), and jobs in state administration were reserved for those from Central Asian regimes.

Education

An emphasis on children's education is rooted in traditional Korean culture. In the Middle Ages, people who had passed an examination for the position of civil servant

were granted financial security for life. Education was, for centuries, the preserve of the ruling class. Members of the ruling class – *yangban* – did not enjoy an automatic and hereditary right to rule; instead, they first had to pass exams.³²

Because children's education was (and is) very important for Koreans, in Soviet times they sent or accompanied their children to study in cities. This move to cities radically changed Korean culture. Koreans generally speak Korean at home (if they live in a *kolkhoz*); however, after moving to the cities, parents began to speak Russian to their children because Korean was not a language that could be used.

Viktor, Chairman of the Korean associations in Uzbekistan, born 1958:

Koreans are very hard working: even though they may have a problem with alcoholism or gambling, you'll never see Koreans in Uzbekistan with hands outstretched for alms. I experienced first-hand working in a kolkhoz, and it was terrible toil: when cultivating rice, we stood from morning until evening knee-deep in water, no mechanisation, leg broken, we had flaked whole pieces of leather. That's why I went with gusto to the city. (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

This move to cities radically changed Korean culture. Koreans generally speak Korean at home (if they live in a *kolkhoz*); however, after moving to the cities, parents began to speak Russian to their children because Korean was not a language that could be used.

However, some Koreans lived in cities immediately after they were deported from the Far East. Several Korean districts (e.g. Fitrat Street and Mirabad) therefore came into existence and, in Tashkent, they held their own markets. However, even in these compact Korean units, relatively rapid cultural changes took place, and usage of the Korean language became less necessary. As the lives of Central Asian Koreans became urbanised, several demographic changes occurred. For example, urban residents had significantly smaller families. Previously, ordinary Korean families had six to eight children, now it was mostly two. Formerly entirely rural, Koreans gradually became a typically urban population in Central Asia. According to the 2009 census in Kazakhstan, 83.8% of Koreans lived as part of an urban population, a higher proportion than any other ethnic group in Kazakhstan. Moreover, 47.1% of Koreans had also undertaken higher education, which again was a higher proportion than any other ethnic group in Kazakhstan.³³

The main elements of the ethnic identity of Soviet Koreans

There are many differences that exist between Soviet Koreans, North Koreans and South Koreans, and it is difficult to identify which is the most salient. Several respondents have stated that they sometimes perceive the main part of their culture as comprising very different elements. When the literature dealing with the transformation of immigrants' identity is reviewed, the term 'third-generation effect' frequently occurs. For example, whereas a son or daughter (member of the second generation) may want

to *forget* their original culture, a grandchild (a member of the third generation) wants to *keep* their original culture. The grandchild therefore feels uprooted – belonging neither to the old nor to the new culture. This is the ‘third-generation’ effect. The first generation usually have problems orienting themselves to a new society and draw strength from their memories and traditions. The second generation adopt the values and attitudes of the new society, resulting in conflict with the first generation. The third generation then try to artificially construct their own dual cultural identity.³⁴

For the Soviet Koreans, the situation is more complicated than this because the process of assimilation and finding space in a new society has undergone several changes. Instead of three exemplar generations, there are several identity-seeking generations. This is because adaptation did not just occur when the Koreans moved, it also occurred following changes in the political system after the collapse of the USSR.

In terms of generations, Koreans can therefore be divided into the following groups:

- (1) Born in Korea, lived in Korea: Soviet Koreans usually know nothing about their relatives in Korea, including their names.
- (2) Born in Korea, moved to Russia: these are Koreans who have tried to achieve comprehensive assimilation (adoption of Orthodoxy, and a change from Korean names into Russian).
- (3) Born in Russia, lived in Russia: despite the efforts of their parents to encourage assimilation, they still retain many elements of Korean culture. This is also due to the fact they are educated in Korean.
- (4) Born in Russia, deported to Central Asia: the deportation of Koreans caused a second wave of uprooting and a deeper acceptance of Soviet culture.
- (5) Born in Central Asia, they spent most of their life in Central Asian republics before the collapse of the USSR: none of these Koreans have Korean first names, but they do have Korean surnames. Some in this generation are trying to maintain fast-disappearing Korean traditions and the specific language of Soviet Koreans, while others are not interested in Korean traditions and perceive them as something foreign.
- (6) Born in Central Asia, they spent most of their life in Central Asian republics after the collapse of the USSR: in cultural terms, the youngest generation of Soviet Koreans is probably the most distant from North or South Korean culture.

The ties between Soviet Koreans and Korea (North, South or unified) were weak in Soviet times. This was because, in the Far East, approximately three generations of Russian/Soviet Koreans had already been born. Furthermore, in Korea, there was little for the Soviet Koreans to admire: North Korea was not an example of economic success and South Korea was, for a long time, a very backward country. For example, after the end of World War II, approximately 78% of Koreans were illiterate.³⁵ In this regard, the Soviet Union initially had a definite advantage in terms of its standard of living.

Later, when South Korea became one of the most highly developed countries, a strong ideological embargo was in place.

Male, aged 65, Tashkent, 2013: *We have always thought how badly South Korea lives. A definite turning point in our view of South Korea*

was the Olympics in 1988; it was amazing how beautiful it looked. Until then, we had rather low national self-confidence, but then, our confidence definitely lifted, as we also saw the economic success of Korea. After the collapse of the USSR, the South Korean government promoted repatriation, or at least the Uzbek Koreans were awarded a three-year work visa to South Korea.

However, according to the respondents, not all Soviet Koreans regarded South Korea as the only promised land. Some took advantage of the opportunity to obtain a work visa and then returned to Central Asia. Others began returning 'home' from Central Asia to the Far East. These were mostly Koreans from Uzbekistan. However, Koreans in Kazakhstan (or Kyrgyzstan) were regarded as less of a foreign element, mainly because of their appearance, and so were less likely to return 'home'.

Male, aged 70, Samarkand, 2013: *A lot of Koreans went home from here. Not to Korea, but to the Far East, where we're at home. In Soviet times it was in some ways better: nobody was looking too much to the nation and they could all speak Russian. Once one became an independent Uzbekistan, Uzbeks suddenly had all the advantages. We speak Russian; although some Koreans can do a little Uzbek, they are often ashamed to use the Uzbek language. We have an Asian face, so we do not hide. In the Far East there is no problem with that.*

In the era of 'perestroika', when the soviet borders gradually began to open, closer cultural ties were established, especially with North Korea. Koreans' interest in potentially becoming a Soviet Korean then sharply increased and this was reflected in a revived interest in Korean attributes, traditional subjects, and customs. The 1988 Olympics in Seoul played a major role in this 'awakening of national consciousness' among Soviet Koreans. Although some cultural elements retained by Koreans living on the Peninsula attracted Soviet Koreans, they did not perceive them to be a major part of their ethnic identity. The second attraction for Soviet Koreans was the high standard of living available in South Korea. This explains why Soviet Koreans were moving to South Korea to work, even though South Korea was, culturally, a different country. Furthermore, because Russian was the mother tongue of the Soviet Koreans, and due to their cultural proximity, Russia became increasingly of interest to South Koreans.

Language

Using a native language is very often one of the pillars of ethnic identity. However, regarding language, there exist two extreme ways of understanding its meaning – essentialist (e.g. Herder³⁶ understands language to be the heart of the nation) and

constructivist (language and ethnic identity are social constructs and as such are relational and negotiable).³⁷ Language may indeed provide an entrance ticket (or a barrier) for members of certain groups, for instance, conversation with a specific accent immediately reveals someone as one of ‘the others’. Language, however, may have other functions – it can be a form of treasure or remembrance to ancestors. This is the case with Soviet Koreans, most of whom do not speak the Korean language, but still appreciate its significance.

In Soviet times, the teaching of the Korean language became increasingly limited. In the tsarist era there were religious schools in the Far East but teaching also took place in Korean. Intellectuals were thus familiar with Russian, Korean, Japanese and Chinese languages. Even when power was assumed by the Bolsheviks, Korean continued to be taught in schools. In the 1920s and 1930s, more than 300 Korean schools and two Korean pedagogical middle schools were present in the Far East, and in 1931, the Korean Pedagogical Institute in Vladivostok (the first Korean university in Russia) was founded. A Korean department was also established at the Far-Eastern University and at the Higher Communist Agricultural School. Six magazines and seven newspapers were published in Korean.³⁸

Up until 1939, all teaching for Koreans was in Korean (in the Far East, and after moving to Uzbekistan). After 1939, teaching in Korean ended but was partially restored after the war. However, at that time, teaching was already taking place in Russian. The teaching of Korean then ended entirely in the 1970s, following which only Russian was taught.

Vladimir San: *I still know little Korean, but that's just my generation (about 70 years old). When I went to school, everything was in Russian; we didn't have Korean as a second language. We learned German (two hours per week), because where we lived, there were also a lot of Germans. (Field research: Astana, 2015)*

Viktor: *I speak Korean just because my parents divorced and I was raised by my grandparents, who spoke Korean. (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)*

In Tashkent, Korean language courses are currently supported by the Korean government. These courses, however, are also attended by Uzbeks who want to work in South Korea. Indeed, teaching Korean to Soviet Koreans does not, for the most part, serve to restore the native language. Instead, it consists of students simply learning an unknown language.

Although the specific language of Soviet Koreans is rapidly disappearing, the 2009 census in Kazakhstan indicates that 36% of local Koreans are native Korean speakers. However, in the 2010 Russian census, only 28% of Koreans said they know Korean. Conversely, 96% of Russian Koreans know Russian³⁹ (current data for Uzbekistan is not available).

It is important to note that the language used by Koreans in the Far East (and later in Central Asia) significantly differed from the language used in North and South Korea. Although all these Korean states use the generic term ‘Korean’, the difference between the three languages is often immense. Indeed, this is pointed out by the respondent.

Woman, 73 years old, from Tashkent: *I speak Korean, I taught Korean, I was on a visit in South Korea. But when I use our Korean, South Koreans don't understand many words: sometimes it is for them a foreign language. Soviet Korean is both much more similar to North Korean and also has absorbed many words from Russian or Uzbek.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2013)

Koreans who came to Russia from the territory that is now North Korea use a dialect that is very different from that of Pyongyang, and even more different from the dialect used in Seoul, which has become the standard form of Korean in the Korean Republic. The differences lie in the phonetic system (omitting certain sounds or, vice versa, observing them), regular and irregular verbs, different ways of forming the plural, and levels of politeness.⁴⁰

Stalin's theoretical concept of the creation of the new Soviet man has significantly manifested itself in the Soviet Koreans and their language. They were unable to create their own 'ethnos' on the foundation of their particular traditions, language, or historic consciousness, as predicted by Bromlei.⁴¹ They had no autonomous units within the USSR and were required to accept the concept of the Soviet nation as a specific 'ethnos' associated with Russian, the universal Soviet language. Some of ethnic groups in the USSR had their own soviet republics and native languages, and in more than 90 percent of these, their native language corresponded to their nationality. Korean was the native language of less than 50 percent of the Korean people, but over 50 percent of them spoke Russian as their native language.⁴²

Cuisine

We eat everything with four legs. Apart from tables and chairs.
(Korean respondent from Kazakhstan)

Food is a very powerful tool for ethnic groups as it enables them to manifest their own identity while expressing many potent symbols – religious, ethnic and social. Soviet Korean cuisine is characterised mainly by the modification of original Korean dishes, which are prepared using major raw materials from locally available ingredients. Conversely, some local (Russian) food uses Korean ingredients: Soviet Koreans occasionally add rice to Russian borscht. In contrast, a Russian side dish (white bread) is served instead of rice in many Soviet Korean restaurants.⁴³

The Korean national dish *kimchi*, which undergoes fermentation and is served as a side dish, is often consumed by people in the Korean peninsula, as well as by Soviet Koreans. Eating *kimchi* is a demonstration of Korean identity and defines Koreans of all types throughout the world. This is despite the fact the cabbage from which it is specially prepared was brought to Korea from China around 100 years ago.⁴⁴ This is because it was difficult to find Chinese cabbage in Soviet times, and it was often

replaced with carrots. This gradually became carrot salad (containing onion, garlic, oil and vinegar) and is now considered a typical dish by Soviet Koreans. It is also very popular with locals who buy this food in large quantities at city bazaars, even in Central Asian states where many Koreans live. Soviet Koreans who visited Korea were often surprised that the *Korean carrot* was totally unknown.

Koreans are often perceived as consumers of dog meat. However, in Korea, this food is not very common, although for outside observers, this (very festive) part of the Korean diet is the most shocking. The popularity of dog meat among Soviet Koreans was not overcome in Soviet times by any form of prohibition or penalties. Respondents in Uzbekistan say that, during the Soviet period, they did not prepare meals from dog meat in the village, but instead used a purpose-built shelter that lay beyond the village. In modern times, Central Asian Koreans have their own restaurants that prepare dishes based on dog meat, and these restaurants are increasingly popular with Kazakhs and Uzbeks. Their popularity has led to the occasional and ridiculous labelling of Koreans as *dog-eaters* by their neighbours.

As well as the Soviet Koreans, there is also a small South Korean community in Tashkent. However, Korean restaurants of either type are separate and distinct from one another. These restaurants are also frequented by other nationalities, which in earlier times would have been an unusual occurrence. In their kitchens, it is apparent that Soviet Koreans have absorbed many external influences. Nevertheless, they consider food preparation and the selection of Korean dishes to be one of the most striking elements of their culture.

Religion

In Korea, Confucianism has long maintained a very strong position (albeit with influences from Buddhism, Taoism and Shamanism) as a form of Neo-Confucianism (Jujahak). This is a complex system based on rituals that are part of everyday life from adolescence onwards – weddings, funerals and ceremonies – and are used to show respect for ancestors. Since the seventeenth century, this system has never been completely coherent; nevertheless, the Korean government drastically punished any deviations from the system, such as those professed by local Christian missionaries and converters.⁴⁵ However, religion in Korea (excluding the official rather than the philosophical-political system Jujahak) has for a long time been very inconsistent.⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century, a new religion – Cheondogyo – began to form and was connected to the Korean national movement. This then became part of the drive towards building a wider Korean ethnicity. Cheondogyo thus became a political tool for Korean nationalists in the struggle for independence against Japan in the early twentieth century.

Those Koreans who left for Russia in the nineteenth century stated they had no problem with the change to Orthodoxy. Consequently, no existing studies have explored the informal religiosity of the Korean population in Russia, and it is therefore a matter of speculation as to whether the conversion to the Orthodox faith was substantial or was simply the outward manifestation of loyalty to the Russian state. However, the fact that religious schools allowed Koreans to receive an education, and to learn the Russian language, certainly played an important role in the adoption of Orthodoxy.

Emilia: *Koreans in the Far East were mainly Orthodox. If they were older, at baptism they received new Orthodox names. Children were given Russian names only. So, when I asked my mother what her original Korean name was, she could not remember; she knew only her Russian one.* (Field research: Bishkek, 2015)

However, for Russian Koreans wishing to create an entirely new identity, simply practicing the Orthodox religion was not enough. After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, believers had been persecuted (including Orthodox Koreans) and further significant deviations from orthodoxy then occurred following their displacement to Central Asia. In Central Asia, Koreans also created *a new Soviet man* (as postulated by the ideology of the Soviet Communist Party) who ought to have been closer to communist ideals than any religion. Following the collapse of the USSR, there was a widespread search for new roots and religion played an important role in this change. For Central Asian peoples (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz), Islam was revived, while for Koreans the search was more complicated with some returning to Orthodoxy, others to Buddhism, and some approaching the new Christian missionaries. In the hearts of Koreans, the search for religious anchorage therefore continues:

Female, 74 years old: *In Soviet times everyone believed Stalin and Lenin. That was our religion, our faith. Everyone must believe in something, and when the Soviet Union collapsed, I became a Baptist. In the 1990s Baptist missionaries from Korea came to our village, I liked what they said ... With religion, it is now difficult in Uzbekistan: everyone has to obtain a licence, so everything is decided by the state.* (Field research: Tashkent region, 2013)

In the 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR, many Protestant missionaries arrived in Central Asia:

Protestant, male: *Protestant missionaries came to us from South Korea, especially in 1993–1995. In 1997, they built a church but there were terrible problems with that later due to property issues. Now, I estimate that the city has about 150 Korean Protestants.* (Field research: Samarkand, 2013)

Korean Catholic priest: *There are Catholics among Soviet Koreans but not too many. South Koreans working in Uzbekistan go mainly to Korean church services.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2015)

For the first time since 1937, the 2009 population census in Kazakhstan examined the religious affiliation of individual ethnic groups. However, the final results did not take into consideration the distribution of these groups. According to the census, the most prevalent religion among Koreans is Christianity (49%), while 29% of Koreans identified themselves as faithless and 11% as Buddhists.⁴⁷ This data shows today's religious indifference among the Soviet Koreans: a specific religion is definitely not a typical element of their ethnicity.

Celebrations

One example of the differences that exist between the Korean groups lies in the counting of birthdays: while Soviet Koreans base their age on their date of birth, other Koreans add an extra nine months. This method for determining age is still widespread among Russian Koreans born before World War II, who also use the lunar calendar.

Male respondent: *I was born in 1952 and I always counted my age normally by date of birth, and not like the South Koreans, who added nine months. My mother counted her birthday in this way.* (Field research: Tashkent, 2015)

Soviet Koreans have indirectly absorbed some elements of the original Korean culture. However, they often paid little or no attention to many Korean customs (for example, the 100-day celebration of the birth of a child or the celebration of a 60th birthday – chvegab/chvangab). During their new search for identity, Soviet Koreans have rediscovered and now respect ancient Korean traditions. This is confirmed by the author of the book *The Habits and Customs of Koreans in CIS*. Following its publication, some Koreans stated that they began to celebrate certain holidays after reading other books by this author.⁴⁸ However, most Soviet Koreans celebrate holidays that originated and were popular in Soviet times, such as International Women's Day (8 March), Victory Day (9 May) and the end of the calendar year (31 December). These holidays remain popular with other Central Asian inhabitants.

Celebration of holidays therefore provides another example of the ethnic identity of the Koreans, which varies depending on the state. Although Soviet Koreans are aware of 'typical' Korean holidays, they are more likely to adhere to Soviet holidays. In contrast, most of the newly introduced Muslim holidays in the Central Asian Republic remain foreign to them.

Associations of Soviet Koreans

The activities undertaken by associations of national minorities are an important element of their consciousness. These activities may be formal – e.g. the publishing of printed material, organising meetings, teaching, etc. – or informal, in that mere membership of the association constitutes an important part of the ethnic identity of its members. The founding of revolutionary societies for Koreans occurred after the February Revolution in 1917. For example, the *Korean Socialist Union* was founded in Khabarovsk in 1918.⁴⁹

In the 1920s, Korean emigrants lived in the territory of Central Asia, especially in Tashkent, and formed socially diverse groups: from workers and peasants, to doctors and war invalids. In 1924, these groups formed the 28 members of the *Association of Koreans of the Turkestan Republic*. The association was abolished in 1926.⁵⁰ The liquidation of minority associations resulted from changes in the party line. In the second half of the 1920s, all manifestations of nationalism began to be referred to as a nationalist aberration. Therefore, for several decades, taking part in the activities of

associations was, for the Korean population, largely impossible. However, although there were no longer any Korean associations, Korean newspapers were published. For example, one Korean newspaper in Kazakhstan is now the second oldest in the country (the oldest is the Communist Pravda/Truth). Until 1991, the newspaper was published in Korean but is now published only in Russian.

Despite the absence of official activities among Korean associations, some contact with Korea was established. For example, in the Kazakh SSR, especially in the 1980s, North Korea helped the Koreans. In return, their leaders then sent Korean teachers to the country and organised free language courses.

Female, 45 years old: *In Soviet times we travelled several times to North Korea, and we were absolutely thrilled: excellent schools, hospitals and libraries, but mostly friendly people, although it was evident that they were not wealthy. When we started going in the 1990s to South Korea, we liked it there too, but North Korea I remember much better. In South Korea, of course, I could not tell anyone that I've ever been to North Korea. The difference was in the organisation of language courses, for example. When the courses were organised by the North Koreans (in the 1980s), they were free. Once the organisation took South Koreans it became business. (Field research: Astana, 2015)*

Associational activities first took place in local Korean centres of culture in large cities (e.g. Tashkent, Alma-Ata, Moscow). Their registration was completed in 1989. At the same time, nationwide cultural centre associations were formed and organisations for all Soviet Koreans were created. However, this has not been without its problems and disputes remain regarding the scope of their activities. Although most Korean associations originating in the former Soviet republics are now focused on South Korea, this orientation was initially unclear.

Valery: *The focus of our association on North Korea has historical reasons. First, it took place in 1989 with the founding of the Association of Koreans in the USSR: ASOK. After the collapse of the USSR, the association turned to the international KO-TO-REN and included all former Soviet republics, where Koreans lived. All associations must choose which Korea will be their focus, since no club can work with both Korean states. In South Korea it is still a crime to meet with someone from North Korea. Associations that focus on South Korea have it much easier in terms of financial support. Our association, NOIN, does not receive any money from Uzbekistan or North Korea but help comes in other ways: for example, in the late 1980s many Korean teachers were sent to Uzbekistan who helped with beginning to teach Korean studies. When they learned that the local Koreans wanted to do folk songs and dances, and Koreans in Uzbekistan did not have instruments, Kim-Il-Sung sent them seven complete sets of Korean instruments. Only later did we discover that one set is worth 120,000 USD. North Koreans helped us publish Korean textbooks, and from Korean universities scientists were sent who studied and collected local folklore conserved for 150 years.*

North Korea invites us to visit: we have arranged everything on the Korean side, members of the association pay only the air ticket. (Field research: Tashkent, 2013).

In the late 1980s, the founding of Korean associations in the former Soviet Union was often characterised by the fact that they were headed mainly by representatives of Korean intelligence. From the second half of the 1990s onwards, the situation began to change significantly and led to associations becoming composed mostly of businessmen. Associations do not usually receive funds for their activities from the state, or if they do these contributions are usually too small. The current model therefore seems to be satisfactory in that the Korean business community provides money to ensure the associations continue to function.

There are currently 24 Korean centres in Uzbekistan: 11 in the Tashkent region and 13 outside the capital (primarily in the Syrdarya, Ferghana and Samarkand regions). Kazakhstan is the centre of the Korean Alma-Ata diaspora with branches in Astana, Karaganda, Kyzyl Orda and Chemkent. The centre of Russian Koreans is Moscow, followed by the big city areas, where many Koreans live: Rostov and Volgograd, Northern Caucasus, the Far East and Sakhalin Island.

For most minorities, the typical activities engaged in by associations serve to maintain ethnic awareness and enable members to demonstrate their strength against the majority. The activities of Soviet Koreans, however, were suppressed in the USSR and limited purely to folklore performances. It was not until the 1990s that Korean associations were created, but this was at a time when Korean ethnic consciousness was overshadowed by the creation of *the new Soviet man*. New associations were then founded by Soviet Koreans, whose culture was completely different to that of Koreans from the peninsula.

Conclusion

There are currently three different-sized groups of Koreans living in Central Asia:

- ‘local’ Koreans, also referred to as ‘Soviets’, who are exiles with descendants from the Far East
- South Koreans (students, workers)
- North Koreans (both legal and illegal immigrants)

These three groups exhibit many historical, linguistic and cultural differences. The differing lifestyles of North Koreans, South Koreans and Soviet Koreans living in one place provides the best example of these cultural and ethnic differences. Consequently, members of one group do not usually consider Koreans from another group as ‘us’ but as ‘distant from them’.

Because the ancestors of Soviet Koreans departed from Korea 150 years ago, there has been a significant transformation in their way of life compared to Koreans on the peninsula. Although Soviet Koreans have lived in Central Asia since the 1930s, in adopting Soviet culture they have become much more ‘European’ (like other Central Asian nations of the former USSR). A long time elapsed before Soviet Koreans established contact with Korea (North or South): a circumstance that was made possible

by the changing political conditions in the USSR. During visits to Korea, Soviet Koreans increasingly recognised the fundamental cultural differences that existed between themselves and North and South Koreans. Ethnic identity has therefore largely developed according to the particular generation of Koreans people originate from.

Racial affiliation is undoubtedly one of the most important influences on the assimilation of Koreans into the former Soviet Union. When this is compared to the assimilation of Koreans in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, it is apparent that the rate of assimilation of Korean minorities in these countries is very different. These are the countries that have the most in common: a common past (pre-Soviet as well as Soviet). Moreover, both states are multinational with a majority Muslim population and a similar official (Turkic) language.

Respondents' answers suggest that Koreans in Kazakhstan were assimilated more easily (unlike Uzbekistan) – the Kazakhs are similar to the Koreans, while Koreans in Uzbekistan are more likely to 'stand out'. However, appearance is not the primary reason for easier assimilation, as Koreans in Russia are not perceived as a foreign element.

The state wields its influence on the ethnic identity of all groups of Koreans. This is partly evident in the case of Koreans from North and South Korea – the division of the country and different international orientation has resulted in the transformation of the language, with many words from English now having been adopted. Other North–South differences are evident in the degree of adherence to tradition or the extent of religiosity. The Soviet Koreans, on the other hand, have absorbed many cultural features over 150 years of life in Russia and Central Asia. These cultural elements separate Soviet Koreans from other Koreans.

The theoretical concepts of solving a national issue in the USSR had a considerable impact upon the Koreans, who like other nations of the USSR passed the phase of state-supported national development (establishment of Korean universities, supporting of Korean press etc.). However, unlike many less numerous nations in the USSR, they never received any level of autonomy. On the contrary, they became the first deported nation in the process of state-controlled deportations. They could be considered as a foreign element in Central Asia, but because of the soviet understanding and creating of the nations,⁵¹ they became seamlessly integrated into society within a relatively short time. The members of the greater society, such as, Kazakh people in Kazakhstan consider the Koreans in Kazakhstan to be culturally close to them ('like us'), but they regard people from other cultures as being 'distant from them'.

This situation has changed significantly since the USSR collapsed, at which point Central Asian republics then became preferred members of the titular nationality. Whereas Soviet Germans or Poles, for example, largely migrated from Central Asia to their 'home' countries after the collapse of the USSR, Korea (North and South) was considered too foreign by Soviet Koreans. This reflects the views of theorists who foresaw the instability of the ethnic communities as well as their ethnic identity.

Separation from the nation state has a substantial impact on ethnic identity. For example, Koreans living on Russia's Sakhalin Island feel a strong sense of belonging to South Korea. This is because Koreans migrated to Sakhalin Island in the first half of the twentieth century and therefore experienced the Japanese era rather than the Stalin epoch. In contrast, Soviet Koreans born in Central Asia feel *at home* in the republic where they live. In some cases, Soviet Koreans refer to the Russian Far East (not Korea)

as their fatherland. Korea is a country close to them, but they see their future elsewhere. Some Koreans, however, have strong opinions on their ethnic displacement as they are considered foreigners in both Korea and the country where they were born.

Notes

1. Howard, "An East German Ethnicity?" 49–70.
2. Eriksen, "Ethnicity and Nationalism," 42.
3. Diener, "Homeland as Social Construct," 201–235.
4. See Shin, *Being a 'Soviet Korean'*.
5. Filippov, *Sovetskaya teoriya etnosa*, 13.
6. Kryukova, "Traditsionnoe vospitanie," 116–119.
7. Kokaisl and Usmanov, *Kyrgyzstandyn tarykhy*, 170.
8. Baldauf, "Some thoughts on the making," 79–95.
9. Maksudov, "Migracii v SSSR," 763–796.
10. Solzhenitsyn, *Rusko v troskách*, 115–120.
11. Tchesko, "Natsional'nye protsessy segodnya," 3–15.
12. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 11–15.
13. Rudnytsky, "Observations on the Problem," 358–368.
14. Hodnett, "The Debate over Soviet Federalism," 458–481.
15. Bromlei, *Otcherki teorii etnosa*, 212, 294, 338.
16. Nádvorníková and Kohoutová, "Různé pohledy na každodennost," 3–22.
17. See Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.
18. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
19. Comaroff, "Humanity, Ethnicity, Nationality," 661–687.
20. Bartold, *Kirgizy*.
21. Przhevalsky, *Puteshestviye v Ussurijskom kraje*.
22. Ibid., 105–119.
23. Nasekin, "Korejcy Priamurskago kraja," 1–61.
24. Khan, *Korejcy Central'noj Azii*, 51–52.
25. Han and Ham, *A review of Korean History*, 122–123.
26. *Korejcy*, 58.
27. Hae-Kyung, "Listening Patterns," 133–134.
28. Kim, *Deportacija*.
29. Kim, *Eshelon*, 58, 63.
30. *Uzbekistonning tanikhli*, 15–17.
31. *Korejcy – zhertvy politicheskikh repressij*.
32. Han and Ham, *A review of Korean History*, 66.
33. Smailova, *Itogi Nacional'noj perepisi*, 22–45.
34. Baštecká, *Psychosociální krizová spolupráce*, 231.
35. Savada, *South Korea: A Country Study*, 115.
36. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*.
37. Lytra, "Language and Ethnic Identity," 133.
38. See Chegaj, *Korejcy Rossii*.
39. Smailova, *Itogi Nacional'noj perepisi*, 22.
40. Stöckelová, *Korjomal*, 46–68.
41. See note 15.
42. Smailova, *Itogi Nacional'noj perepisi*, 15.
43. Song, "Kimchi, Seaweed," 78–84.
44. Young, "Authenticity and Representation," 109–125.
45. *Inside the Catholic Church of Korea*, 12–13.
46. Hanuš, "Jihokorejská kulturní specifika," 109–131.
47. Smailova, *Itogi Nacional'noj perepisi*, 25.

48. See Li, *Obychai i obryady*.
49. *Korejcy*, 33.
50. Kim, *Pravda – polveka spustja*, 11.
51. See note 8.

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Notes on contributor

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